2017-06-09

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Center for Homeland Defense and Security master’s degree alumnus Darren Price shared his thesis research with a NATO Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Specialists meeting on May 16.

In an era of rapid technology change and a constant shifting of threats, Price wanted to ensure his thesis remained relative for an extended amount of time. A discussion led by John Rollins of the Congressional Research Service during the Technology for Homeland Security course helped solidify Price’s vision for his thesis, “Unmanned Aircraft Systems for Emergency Management: A Guide for Policy Makers and Practitioners.”

“It didn’t take long for me to connect the dots and see the applicability [of UASs] to emergency management,” Price said. “Unmanned aircraft systems won’t take the place of what we offer, but it’s another tool in the toolbox for emergency managers.”

While the increasingly popular technology’s potential has long been savored by the military, law enforcement and fire/EMS communities, Price discovered an untapped topic in discussing uses for emergency managers, including speedy damage assessments, missing persons searches, bridge inspections and environmental modeling.

Price recently tailored his presentation to a NATO audience from nations that often employ military forces for disaster response and recovery, impressing upon them the value of local and state partnerships and resources.

“The U.S. Department of Defense has assisted, and will continue to assist, in responding to natural disasters,” Price noted. “When responding to disasters in the U.S., they fall under the authority of a local incident commander for mission assignment purposes. While they maintain autonomy and command of their respective units, they serve as a resource for the local incident commander,” “That is a different approach than what we see with many of our NATO allies. I wanted to impress on them the importance of working with local and state civilian authorities and how that process works in the U.S.”

The presentation also addressed regulations, privacy issues, operational hurdles along with privacy concerns.

Mirroring his thesis, Price’s primary intent was to direct the audience to a 12-step needs assessment and a decision tree designed to guide policy-makers and practitioners through the process of implementing a UAS program by raising questions they may not have considered. Factors to consider include feasibility, financing, identifying an agency or department to take the lead in policy making and educating the public on the benefits of the technology.

The policy guide, inclusive of the needs assessment and decision tree, was developed as the research of his thesis evolved while working with his advisors, Rollins and Lauren Fernandez.

“That (the policy guide) was not in my original outline, but it became a clear need as there really wasn’t much information out there for emergency managers,” Price said. “I looked at what the needs were from an emergency management perspective. I didn’t know how many steps there would be. I just went where the research led me.”

His work has also led to numerous speaking engagements on the benefits of UASs for emergency management. In addition to the NATO Specialists’ Meeting, he has presented at a UAS Conference at the University of Cincinnati and at a national UAS Conference in Virginia. Price also recently served on the panel for a UAS Roundtable Discussion, hosted in Washington, D.C. by the Domestic Preparedness Journal, and has authored articles for professional and academic publications.

Toiling through the rigor of the CHDS master’s program has influenced how Price approaches his daily job, nurturing

the critical thinking skills and the ability to ingest and understand information rapidly.

“I’ve become a more critical thinker,” Price said. “You find yourself asking more questions, while looking for supporting evidence of claims that are made. The NPS/CHDS master’s program has opened many doors, both professionally and personally, for which I am very grateful. The benefit of the program for the sponsor is I didn’t go through the program for 18 months and just stop. I’ve continued to advance my research and champion the use of UASs for emergency management, as well as the many benefits of the programs offered by CHDS.”

See more on CHDS Viewpoints: Unmanned Aircraft Systems for Emergency Management